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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000214

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [KDEM](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: THE UGLY--AND UNUSUAL--SPECTER OF ANTI-SEMITISM
SHOWS ITSELF IN OFFICIAL ARMENIAN PROPAGANDA

REF: A. YEREVAN 127
[1](#)B. 07 YEREVAN 1479

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Classified By: CDA Joseph Pennington for reasons 1.4 b & d.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Armenia's presidential election period bizarrely featured an unwelcome guest: anti-Semitism. A government-affiliated national television network aired a despicable, hour-long "documentary" of hate speech, that labeled the leading opposition candidate a "Zionist Jew" in cahoots with the Israeli intelligence service just days before the election; thousands of DVDs of the same program were distributed through university student organizations. State television news broadcasts continued the theme during the opposition's post-election rallies, provoking concern that a new and sinister element of hatred has become a tool of Armenian politics. While Armenia's small Jewish community continues to insist that anti-Semitism is unheard of in the country, GOAM efforts to denounce its opponents using anti-Jewish propaganda are, at the least, disturbing. Embassy complained to the government's anti-discrimination czar -- only to have her resign from the government days later, in protest over the larger political situation. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) As reported Ref A, in the days prior to the February 19 election, a viciously anti-opposition DVD began to be distributed primarily to youth groups and at universities. The DVD attempted to portray former President and leading opposition candidate Levon Ter-Petrossian (LTP) in the most crude and outlandish ways as, inter alia, an agent of the Israeli intelligence services and a "Zionist Jew" by virtue of his wife being Jewish. The documentary also mentioned by name the Jewish Amcit Country Director for the EBRD in Armenia as included in LTP's "Zionist plot." Surprisingly, the DVD's "documentaries" were reportedly aired on Armenia's second television channel, H2, on the evening of February 14, where, according to Nielsen ratings, it was viewed by some ten percent of Armenians watching television at the time. H2 is a privatized, formerly state-run network, whose owners are close to ruling party leaders. Its editorial policy is consistently pro-governmental. Among the basest of claims the program made was a "factoid" that when the former President had taken his oath of office in 2001--in front of the Catholicos, no doubt--he had not rested his hand on an Armenian bible but on a copy of the Talmud. (NOTE: Besides the preposterousness of the ancient book shown in the video being anything close to the 24-volume exposition on Jewish law, the claim drew in elements from the notorious Russian forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which purports

that the Talmud is the Jewish blueprint for world domination.
END NOTE.)

13. (U) This kind of brandishing LTP as Jewish and as an Israeli agent continued during the post-election period when, for 11 days, LTP's supporters gathered in Freedom Square in the center of Yerevan. At first Haylur, the official state-television news broadcast on public television (H1), ignored the rally in the square and resorted to showing, at length, small groups of pro-government supporters lambasting the opposition. On the evening of February 27, however, three days before the government would violently crackdown on the protesters, Haylur devoted three minutes of its airtime to covering the opposition protests by showing the same short clip over and over of LTP joyously dancing at the rally interspersed with close ups of an Israeli flag that had appeared in the crowd. The piece featured no commentary and was introduced by the news announcer mocking LTP and the rally's participants, but was clearly designed to make LTP look like a fool and reinforce the pro-government anti-Semitic propaganda regarding the former President. (NOTE: A number of international flags were waved at various times during the rally -- Ukraine was especially prominent, in a nod to the Orange Revolution -- but the televised footage was carefully edited to show only the Israeli flag, and at such an angle as to make the flag seem larger than life, looming over dais speakers. END NOTE)

14. (C) In response to these disturbing shows of anti-Semitism, Emboffs approached the director of the Department of Ethnic Minorities and Religious Affairs, Hranush Kharatian, on February 28 to protest such messages being aired on governmental and quasi-governmental networks. Kharatian, a key Embassy contact in the preparation of the annual International Religious Freedom report, expressed her own disgust at the airing of such material and said she would speak to the Chairman of the Board of National Radio and

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Television, with whom she had "many other things to discuss." Following the GOAM's violent crackdown on opposition demonstrators on the night of March 1-2, Kharatian quit her position in protest of her government's actions. She relayed to emboffs that she had never had the opportunity to meet with the Chairman, but had included the "flagrant use of anti-Semitic rhetoric on state-run television" as one of reasons she cited in her letter of resignation.

15. (C) The small Armenian Jewish community has been cautious in its reactions to this government propaganda. Not wanting to appear to undermine the government, Community Chairwoman Rimma Varzhapetian, whose husband works in the Armenian Presidency, issued a statement against LTP and his supporters for the "use of the Israeli flag" at their rallies. She further emphasized that there is no--"and has never been"--anti-Semitism in Armenia and that the Jewish Community remains "firmly with the government." (NOTE: This mirrored Varzhapetian's comments after a swastika had been found late last year on Yerevan's Joint Jewish-Armenian Tragedy Memorial (See Ref B). END NOTE.)

16. (C) COMMENT: Anti-Semitism per se is a foreign concept in Armenia, a country that has had no history of such hatred. Nevertheless, the use of such anti-Semitic rhetoric by government elements, even though its context may be lost on most Armenians, is disturbing. It is not inconceivable that the Israeli flag at the rally was displayed there by a government provocateur. Regardless, the GOAM cannot condone such hateful imagery and still claim that anti-Semitism does not exist in the country. END COMMENT.
PENNINGTON